7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

with a piece of soft wood between his teeth, and the "dentist" bored a hole in one of his front teeth. The agony the patient endured must have been very great, judging by the look on his face and his occasional bodily contortions. The next thing was to insert the end of a pointed brass wire, which was then filed off, leaving a short piece in the tooth; a small hammer was used to fix this in tightly, and, lastly, a little more filing was done to smooth the surface of the brass stud. I am told the process is so painful that it is not often a man can bear to have more than one or two teeth operated on at a time.

The Dyaks do not like beards, and much prefer a smooth face. In the whole course of my Dyak experience I have only met with one bearded man. The universal absence of hair upon the face, on the chest, and under the arm-pits might lead one to suppose that it was a natural deficiency. But this is not the case at all, as old men and chronic invalids, who by reason of age or infirmity have ceased to care about their personal appearance, have often chins covered with a bristly growth. The absence of hair on the face and elsewhere is due to systematic depilation. The looking-glass and tweezers are often seen in the hands of the young men, and they devote every spare moment to the plucking out of stray hairs. *Kapu*, or quicklime, which is one of the constituents of betel-nut mixture chewed by the Dyaks, is often rubbed into the skin to destroy the vitality of the hair-follicles.

Among some tribes it is the fashion for both men and women to shave the eyebrows and pull out the eyelashes, and this gives their faces a staring, vacant expression. I have often tried to convince them of the foolishness of trying to improve upon nature in this way, and pointed out that both eyebrows and eyelashes are a protection

11:Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1957 OC6 Iban OC6

rituals—which was how we had come to know her. When we told her that we would very much like to learn something about the Iban way of making earthenware pots she said she would be glad to help us, and she agreed that the next day we should follow the making of a pot from the gathering of the clay onwards.

In 1949, Runin was a widow of about 65 years. She had been born in a long-house of the Sungai Ngemah, to which river her ancestors had migrated from the headwaters of the Batang Ai, and she had been living in the Sungai Tiau since about 1923, a year after the Baleh region was re-opened to settlement following the quelling of Iban rebels in the Rejang, the Mujong and the Gat.[5] At 65, Runin stood at the head of a *bilek* family of seven members. Her greatest delight in life was Tukang, aged 3, her grandson.[6] Tukang was the son of Demai (aged 25 years) the daughter of Runin's deceased sister Payah, and Demai it was who was deputed by Runin to go, the next day, and collect the clay for the making of further pots. Demai called in, as a helper, Inyan, aged 14 years, the granddaughter of Runin's sister-in-law, Irin, who lived in a neighbouring apartment of the long-house.

Soon after ten o'clock the next morning (26th November, 1949), Demai and Inyan came to tell us that they were ready to go and dig for clay. They had with them two long-bladed knives (*duku*) and two circular baskets (*lekit*) lined with freshly plucked banana leaves (*daun pisang*). The spot where Demai hoped to find suitable clay was on the western bank of the Tiau River just opposite the long-house. Other women of the long-house, she said, had made pots with clay from this source, but never Runin, who usually obtained her supplies from deposits further inland, now cut off by the flooded river.

Because the Tiau was in flood we had to make the crossing to the western bank by canoe (*prau*). Within a few minutes Demai had located a narrow seam of clay just above the level of the swollen river. After testing a piece of the clay by pressing it between her fingers she announced that it would do, and after an admonitary word to Inyan and ourselves she commenced to dig. (Plate 1).*

Her admonition was a strange one. Before setting out from the long-house Demai had solemnly warned us of a taboo (*pemali*)

*Plate numbers referred to by Dr. Freeman are cross-indexed to S.M.J. sequence at p.174, q.v.

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that had to be observed during the whole of the time that the pots were being made—from the first gathering of the clay to the completion of firing. It was vitally important, she said, that all persons having anything to do with the making of the pots should at no stage, when they were handling or dealing with the clay or the partially made pots, emit wind.

Such prohibitions as this are called by the Iban *pemali*, and this particular prohibition against the emission of wind (*pemali kentuat*), like many other Iban *pemali*, is an instance of homoeopathic magic. In the judgement of the Iban there is a clearly recognizable similarity between the noise that a person makes when emitting wind and the noise that a pot makes when it bursts in the course of firing. Further, the Iban believe that if someone engaged in the making of pots should happen, while so doing, to emit wind—even though involuntarily—that this occurrence is liable to result in the bursting of one or more of the pots when, later, they come to be fired. In short, the logic of the belief is (as Sir James Fraser has phrased it) "that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause."[7]

Among the Iban there are very many such magical prohibitions, and they are associated with virtually every kind of important ritual or economic activity. Furthermore, many *pemali* are so widely known and so firmly established that they can be said to be part of Iban custom, or *adat*, and there are some *pemali* the transgression of which involves a stipulated form of expiation (i.e. by the sacrifice of a fowl or pig) and the payment of a fine to the persons whose interests have been affected. In the case of the prohibition under discussion however, there was no such specific penalty, and no one we asked had heard of action being taken against anyone because of its violation. It was a rule of conduct which everyone—apparently—obeyed.

The seam of clay that Demai had selected was narrow and uneven. As she worked she examined each handful with care. She was primarily interested in making an estimate of the plasticity of the clay she was collecting, and so each piece as she gathered it was fingered for a few moments to ensure that it was sufficiently *liat* (plastic). Any clay that did not reach the standard she had set was at once rejected. As Demai's standards were exacting and the seam of clay poor (much of it being intermixed

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(1) The gathering of the clay (Iban pot-making).

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(2) Clay being laid out in the sun (Iban pot-making).

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with small stones) the process was a slow one: to collect about one *gantang* (gallon) of useable clay took 45 minutes. This amount, said Demai, would be enough for about five or six pots.

When we arrived back at the long-house Runin was busily occupied putting cotton on to a tying-frame (*tangga ajan*)—one of the most complicated processes in the technique of *ikat* weaving. Unable to attend to the task herself she instructed Demai to go on with the next stage in the handling of the clay: the sunning of it. Demai took a small mat (of the kind known as *tikai sengang*) and laid it out on that section of the *tanju*, or open platform of the long-house that belonged to Runin's apartment. Then, from the pile of clay she had collected in her basket she broke off small lumps—each about the size of a hen's egg—and laid them in rows on the mat. (Plate 2). It was by now mid-day. For the rest of that day and during the following morning the pieces of clay were left out in the full heat of the sun. The purpose of this, said Runin, was to dry the clay thoroughly, ready for the next process of pounding and sieving.

The [illegible]aid out to sun, we returned with Demai to Runin's apartment. Soon after we had sat down Mut, aged 18, the son of Runin's deceased sister Giram and a member of Runin's *bilek* family, strode in. He had in his hands several cobs of corn (*Zea mays*) which, so it appeared, he was intending to roast in the embers of the fire that was burning on the family hearth. Drying on a rack above this hearth were the two pots that Runin had made the previous day. As soon as she realized what he was about Runin called to him in an agitated voice to go to some other apartment to roast his corn, giving as her reason: *"Takut priok aku blah"* ("For fear that my earthenware pots should burst.") Mut gave a grin of understanding and at once left—carrying his corn. Here we have another prohibition (*pemali lingkau*) closely resembling that already mentioned. When corn is roasted those seeds which are exposed to the full heat of the fire often explode with distinctly audible 'pops.' It is the belief of the Iban that corn roasted in this way in close proximity to unfired clay pots may result in those pots exploding when in due course they come to be fired. Similarly, there is a prohibition (*pemali getah*) against the use of damar gum in the vicinity of partially completed pots for the same reason that damar—an ancient form of illumination among the Iban—splutters and explodes as it burns.